

2. Revelation: The Greeting to the Seven Churches

Text: Revelation 1:3-8

Ps. Johnny Lesnik

Preached: 5th November 2023 @ Logan Christian Fellowship

▶ Introduction:

One reason that Revelation is very interesting is because it's the only book in the Bible that has a blessing promised at the beginning and a warning posted at the end. **Revelation 1:3**

▶ **"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."** We all know we are blessed when we study and read God's word but this is the only book in the Bible that promises a specific blessing to the people who not only read it and hear it, but especially those who obey the things that are found in it. So hang in here. Read this book. Study this book and the Bible says you are in for a special blessing.

▶ There is also a warning posted at the end in **22:18**. The Lord Jesus says, **"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book."** So, it's a very dangerous practice to add to the words of the scripture. Take them just like they are—don't add to them. Then in **verse 19**, **"And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."** I think that is a principle that holds true to all the word of God, Genesis through Revelation. Don't take away from it and don't add to it... but it is a specific warning to this one prophecy.

▶ Now, this morning we will look at chapter 1:4-8. I'll call this message, **"The Greeting To The Seven Churches"**. There is so much good stuff here that it will build up your understanding of Jesus Christ and the relevance of this book. Let's read... **REVELATION 1:4-8**.

▶ I. THE GREETING

Let's begin by talking about the greeting or the salutation that's at the start of this prophetic book. **Illustration:** Have you ever received a long letter from somebody? Usually the first thing you do is go all the way back to the back of the letter to find out who it's from. Right? Because if you don't, when you start reading it won't make much sense if you don't know who it's from. And so you say, "Oh that's from Aunt Sue." And so, once you know who it's from, you go back to the beginning and when you read it, it makes sense. But in the Bible days, they had a practice which I think is better than what we do today because they put the name of the writer first.

▶ 1. The writer—John was an old man by now

That's why verse 4 says. **"John"** so that's the first thing we want to look at in this greeting. Who is the writer of the revelation? It is the Apostle John. Several times in this book he calls himself, **"I, John"**. John and James were the sons of Zebedee. They were called **"the sons of thunder,"** which could mean they had rather boisterous personalities. Sometimes we picture the disciples as being very poor and unlearned, but did you notice in the gospel according to Mark that when James and John left their father, Zebedee, it says they left their father with all the hired servants and the boats? James and John were a part of a family fishing industry that was prosperous enough for them to have employees. So they came from that kind of a family. It is said by tradition that John was the youngest of all the twelve disciples.

Now, history shows that 10 of the twelve disciples died a martyrs' death. Now, the two exceptions were Judas Iscariot who committed suicide, at which point the church then elected Matthias to replace him in Acts 1. And the other exception was John who did not die as a martyr.

Now, I shared with you last week about the tradition says the Emperor Domitian tried to kill John by boiling him in oil. But by a miracle of God, he survived and then was then exiled. In fact, if you will, look down in *chapter 1, verse 9* He says, **"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."** He is exiled on the island of Patmos and he received this vision this prophecy from the Lord. So that's the writer John.

▶ 2. The recipients—these seven literal churches represent all churches

Who are the ones receiving this prophecy? **“To the seven churches in the province of Asia.”** Take a minute and look ahead at chapter 2 and 3. There are seven letters to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and the church in Laodicea. Those were seven literal congregations in Asia Minor which is today’s Turkey. When you think of churches, don’t think of buildings because they didn’t have buildings. These were congregations, groups of baptized believers meeting together in people’s homes. As I told you those seven churches were seven actual little churches but they represent all churches of all church history even up to today. And you know what? You will find that even here in our small fellowship, we have some Christians who are Philadelphia Christians, we have some Christians who are Ephesus Christians, we have some Christians who are Sardis Christians and some who are Laodicea Christians. You see... they represent all churches of all time. Those are the recipients.

▶ 3. Grace and Peace

Notice the greeting John gives, **“Grace to you and peace from Him.”** It is very interesting in the Bible that grace and peace always appear in that order. You never hear of peace and grace. Do you know why? **Because you can’t have peace until you have the grace of God!** Just like repentance and faith. It’s never faith and repentance. You repent and then you put your faith and trust in God just like Jesus preached in Mark 1. You receive the grace of God and then you have peace. It’s a very common greeting.

▶ 4. The Trinity

We also find in chapter 1:4-5 the reference to the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit... the three co-equal Persons of the Godhead. **“From Him who is, and who was, and who is to come and from the Seven Spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ.”** You might say, “What in the world is that talking about? Seven Spirits???”

In my last message, I briefly mentioned Jewish Gematria, which is the relevance of numbers how every number represents something. Seven in the Bible represents perfection, wholeness, completion. There are not seven holy spirits. There is one Holy Spirit who is perfect, whole, and

▶ complete in His ministry and this is very evident in **Isaiah 11:2** which talks about the sevenfold ‘perfect’ ministry of the Holy Spirit. So you have God the Father **“who is and who was and who is to come”**, the Holy Spirit and, of course, you read in **verse 5 “and from Jesus Christ.”**

Now, remember what I said to you last time... Revelation is not going to reveal the future to you. It’s going to reveal Jesus to you and the most important thing that you need to know about our future is that Jesus is in control and Jesus is coming back! Amen! You see, in Revelation you’re going to learn more about Jesus Christ because there are **more titles and descriptions of Jesus in the book of Revelation than in any other book of the Bible!**

▶ How is He described? **“He is the faithful witness.” (1:5)** Some witnesses are not faithful, but Jesus is. **“He is the firstborn from the dead.”** What does that mean? The Bible says elsewhere **“He is the first fruits of the resurrection” (1 Cor. 15:23).** He was the first one to be resurrected from the dead, but He is only the first and there are going to be many others of us included! We’ll be resurrected if we’re dead when Jesus comes back but if Jesus comes back and raptures the church before we die, we won’t be resurrected, we’ll just be changed. Another title states, **“He is ruler of the kings of the earth.”** In Revelation 19 we are told that His name is **‘King of kings and Lord of Lords’**. When John comes to the topic of the person of Jesus Christ, he breaks out into an exclamation of praise or doxology **(verse 6)** about Jesus. And we ought to also!

▶ II. THE DEDICATION: THE BOOK IS DEDICATED TO JESUS

That leads us to the second part of this message today: the dedication. **Illustration:** You know how you might watch a movie or read a book and it says at the beginning, ‘this is dedicated to such and such’? Well, I remember when I married my beautiful wife and at our wedding reception I wrote a song that I sung for her. And when I got up in front of everyone I said, ‘This song is dedicated to the one I love’. Now, John also dedicated this book to someone but he said it differently... he says, ‘This is dedicated to the One who loves me.’ **“To Him who loved us...” (1:5b).**

▶ 1. Jesus finds us with His love

Look, this is just so powerful to pause and think about. In today's western Christianity we sing so much of how we love Jesus, but the reality is that our love is very pitiful compared to His great love for us. Just think about the greatest command Christ gave us: **"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment** (Mark 12:30). Have you obeyed that command fully... even just today? And so, you can see that it's not about our love for Him, but rather His love for us and that is worth talking about and singing about! Let's just talk about His love a bit more... this is how His love is seen: He came looking for you, in order to find you and demonstrate His love for you.

▶ **Illustration:** I remember many years ago seeing ads on TV from Campus Crusade for Christ that had this theme called, "I Found It!" Billboards said, "I Found It!" Bumper stickers said, "I Found It!" People coming on television saying, "Hello, my name is so and so and I found it!" It was sort of a hook to get people curious. Then they would talk about how they found Jesus Christ. That's okay and I don't have any problem with it but the truth is you didn't find him. God was never lost in the first place! You were the one who was lost and He found you! The reality is that you were searching for God the same way a criminal searches for a police officer! And that is what Religion is all about - man searching for God and I don't have much time for religion. But Christianity is about God searching for man. Jesus said, "I came to seek and to save that which was lost!" (Luke 19:10). The question is, 'Do you want to be found???'

Oh, church... if only I had the words to describe the love of the Father toward you. Do you truly realise how the Father feels about you? In **Luke 15**, Jesus said, **"The Father feels about you the same way a shepherd feels about one sheep that wanders off. That shepherd is willing to go and search and find that sheep and carry it in his arms."** Jesus said, "That's what the Father feels about the sinner who repents!" Do you know how the Father feels about you? Jesus said, **"The Father feels the same way about you like a woman would feel who has ten special coins and she loses one of those coins in her house. She is so concerned about that one lost coin that she turns her house upside down and sweeps it clean looking under every bed, every chair until she finds that one coin."** Jesus said, "That's how much the Father loves the sinner who repents!" Do you know how much the Father loves you? Jesus said, **"The Father feels for you the same as a father whose son has wandered off into sin. When that son comes back to his senses and returns to his father - that father literally runs out to claim that son again."** You see that's how much God loves the sinner who repents. That's how much He loves you! You see, you didn't go looking for God. God sent his Son looking for you and that's the glorious truth. Jesus found us with his love.

▶ 2. Jesus washes us with His blood

There's another thing here John says about Jesus as he dedicates this prophecy to Him. **"Jesus washes us with his blood."** Look at verse 5. If you have a NIV Bible it says, **"He has freed us from our sins by his blood."** but the NKJV says, **"He has washed us from our sins by his blood."** So, what is it? It's the same idea.

▶ **Here's the picture:** Let's say I'm dressed in my Sunday's finest clothes and I'm walking to Church. But on the way a car goes through a dirty water pool and it flicks dirt and filth all over me. What should I do? Chase the driver down and take out my rage on him? No! ☺ But rather I need to get cleaned up. But how do I get that dirt off my clothes? You say, throw it in the wash machine. Yes, but how exactly does that dirt come away from the clothing? Well, when you add water and you wash it, that dirt comes loose. It's set free. Just like those laundry detergent commercials... all the dirt and the grime are set free. That's what this is talking about— Jesus Christ has set us free from our sins. How? By His blood.

There are some people who believe that your sins are washed away by water baptism... but let me tell you that it's not the water in the baptistry, or the pool, or the river that washes away your sins. It only the blood of Jesus Christ that can do it. So, if you've never yet experienced the freedom there is in having your sins washed away and forgiven by God, then ask Him today. Don't delay another moment! Nothing else can remove your guilt in the sight of a holy God but the precious blood of the Lamb of God.

▶ 3. Jesus fashions us for His service

So, Jesus finds us with his love; He washes us with his blood, that is, He sets our sins free from our lives; and then Jesus fashions us for His service. This means shaping, building, transforming us. It says here in **verse 6, “and He made us kings and priests.”**

Illustration: I remember when I was in the Police Academy, when my peers found out I was a Christian, they had a nickname for me... Father John. You see, for many of them their only religious reference point is that of a Catholic priest. And so they called me, Father John. But that's okay. Do you know why? Because I am a priest. Do you know what else? You are a priest also! In fact, the Bible says God made us or He fashioned us “into a

▶ **kingdom of priests.”** So this literally reads that Jesus is building us into a kingdom of priests.

This is such an important doctrine to understand as evangelical Christians, “The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers.” What does that mean? It means there is no other Christian who is more highly elevated spiritually than you are. You don't have to go through some priest to get to God. You don't have to pray through anybody except the Lord Jesus Christ who is our High Priest to get to God. You're a priest and I'm a priest. But, what does that mean? Well, what does a priest do in the Old Testament? A priest in the Old Testament did two things: First, he talked to God on behalf of the people. He then went into the Temple and prayed and talked to God on behalf of all the people out there who did not have access to God. That's what you do when you pray for other people. When you are involved in the Intercessory Prayer ministry, you are fulfilling your priestly responsibility. When you talk to God on behalf of others.

A priest not only talked to God on behalf of others, but secondly, he talked to others on behalf of God. When you pray for people, you are fulfilling that first role but when you are talking to people and telling them about Jesus Christ and telling them about what God's word says then you are fulfilling that second role. You are talking to other people on behalf of God. So guess what? You're a priest. You may not wear a backward collar, you may not wear a robe but you are a priest. No one is more highly elevated than you are.

One of the worst doctrines that ever fell on this planet is this idea of some kind of spiritual distinction between clergy and laity. That is straight out of the Roman Catholic Church. You see, there the priests there have certain sacramental authority that average people do not have. But we do not believe that! You see, God gifts different people in different ways. God has gifted me and he has called me to be a pastor teacher, but that does not elevate me any more than any of you. Some of you are gifted for the gift of service, others are gifted for the gift of teaching, some of you are gifted for encouragement, some for worship... and when all the gifts are functioning together that's when the church is alive and is no longer paralysed! But nobody is more important than anybody else. So we learn here that Jesus is fashioning us into a kingdom of priests!

▶ III. THE DESCRIPTIONS – of Christ.

And finally today, let's look at a few descriptions of Jesus. I told you this book is all about Jesus and that's all we are talking about today: **JESUS**. In verses 7 and 8 are some further descriptions of who Jesus is and what he's going to be doing.

▶ 1. The Coming King

Verse 7 is sort of a preview of the rest of the book. **“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him.”** Jesus is pictured as “the coming King” That's why we sing, “The King is coming,” because the King *is* coming (Jer. 23:5; Zec. 9:9). It says in verse 7 Jesus is coming back, it says, **“with clouds.”** Please don't misunderstand this. When Jesus comes back to rapture the church, he is coming **“in the clouds” (1 Thess. 4:17)**... literally the clouds are the sky and the Bible says, **“the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”**

That is the rapture. That is an event that could happen at any moment... there is not a single thing that has to be fulfilled for that to happen. It could happen at any moment. It could happen before I finish this sentence! This is talking about when Jesus Christ will come **“with clouds”**. You know what that is? This is a reference to the clouds of people (**Heb. 12:1**) he will bring with him at the Second Coming when **“every eye will see him.”**

- ▶ Have you ever been a little bit confused about the Second Coming? There are some passages that say when Jesus comes back He's going to come **“as a thief in the night”**. He's going to slip in suddenly, silently, secretly and then be gone. And then you might say, “There are other passages that talk about Him coming ‘in power and majesty and glory and every eye is going to see him’. Well, which one is it?” YES! 😊
- ▶ When He comes to rapture the church, it will be like a thief in the night– suddenly in the twinkling of an eye... Matt. 24 tells us that **“two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left”** – but when He comes back seven years later at the Battle of Armageddon **“every eye will see him.”** When He comes back to rapture the church, believers will see Him then. Everybody else will see Him seven years later, whether in the second resurrection (the resurrection of the unjust) or those who are alive when He comes the second time. So He is pictured as “the coming King.”
- ▶ Notice what else it says about it, **“Even they who pierced him.”** Some folks are going to be glad to see Jesus. Others aren't going to be glad to see Jesus. Think about it: Can you imagine the very people who must have taken those nails and held them on the hands of Jesus and hammered those nails into His hand and His feet? Those folks are dead. When they are resurrected and they see Jesus whom they pierced... can you imagine how they are going to feel? Who was it that really crucified Jesus? You say, “The Roman soldiers did it.” They did the actual piercing but who really did it? You say, “The Jews did it because they are the ones who told the Romans to do it.” Who really did crucify Jesus? In a real sense, God the Father crucified Him because the Bible says, **“And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6) and “Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer” (Is. 53:10 NIV)**. Do you really want to know the truth about who crucified Jesus? We all did! Because it was our sin that killed the Lord Jesus (**1 Jn. 2:2 – He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world**) and so **“even those who pierced him”** are going to look upon Him when He comes back.

▶ 2. The Alpha & Omega

Not only is He the coming King, He is Alpha and Omega. In verse 8 He says, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega.”** Some of you don't know what those words mean. In the Greek alphabet Alpha is the first letter. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta...Omega is the last letter. So to say, “He is the Alpha and the Omega” is to say, “He is the A and the Z and everything in between.” He is the first and the last; He's the beginning and the end and He's everything in between. That means Jesus is everything. **Illustration:** *Can you think of any English word that can be spelled without using the 26 English letters of the alphabet? I've got quite a few books on my book shelves at home and I can tell you that every book written in English there uses those 26 letters. In fact, the University of Queensland holds Queensland's biggest library – over 2 million books! But every word in every book there utilises those 26 letters – A to Z and everything between. So this is saying, “Everything that is, is Jesus! Jesus is everything!”*

- ▶ Yes... He is much bigger than your mind can handle and comprehend.
- ▶ **“for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)**
- ▶ **“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (Col. 1:17)**
- ▶ I remember an old, old song that used to be sung quite a bit called, **“He is everything to me!”** It used to be an old favourite for many... “He is everything to me.” But you know what? If you really think about it, that song really is not all that important because the truth is “He is everything – full stop!” Whether he is everything to me or not, is irrelevant... “He is everything. Full stop!” He is the Alpha and the Omega and everything in between.

So with Christ being the beginning and the ending... this tells us that there is nothing outside His knowledge (**Colossians 2:3: 'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'**). Folks, take great comfort in that fact because even when it feels like the world is out of control or that everything is against you, be assured that Jesus is in complete control of the situation. There is nothing that escapes His knowledge. That's why He is called at the end of **verse 8, 'the Almighty'** - El-Shaddai, the Omnipotent God!

▶ 3. The Almighty I Am

Then the final description: He is the Almighty I AM. When it says in **verse 8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega"** it is more than just a verb of existing or being. It says, **"says the Lord who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."** That means Jesus Christ is the past, He is the present, and He is the future. What does the phrase, "I AM" mean? Do you remember back in Exodus 3, when Moses stood at the burning bush and God spoke to him and said, "Go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let my people go!" Moses said, "Okay, God. But I have to know your name," because all their gods in Egypt had names. "What's your name?" God said, "You tell them that my name is 'I AM.' You just tell them 'I AM' sent you." You say, "That's a strange name for a god." When God said to Moses, "I AM" He is saying, "I have always been. I AM being right now and I will always be!" But, you see, we can't say that. We've never "always been." We are right now and we will always be but there was a time when we were not! But not God. God said, "I've always been. I'm being right now and I will always be." Jesus is saying there, "Everything in this life is so temporary but I've always been and I'll continue to be." That's why only He can say, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).**

There are only two eternal things from this point on in this world: the word of God and the souls of men and women. Your houses, your bank accounts, your cars, your cash, your possessions, your bodies; everything else is temporary and it will disintegrate. Only the word of God and the souls of men and women will last for ever and ever. Jesus said, "This is who I am. I am the coming King, get ready for Me." He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, I am everything you need, from A to Z. I will always be and my word will never pass away."

CONCLUSION

Illustration: A number of years ago, my wife went and visited our old neighbour who was 80 at the time, and he was always giving us books. The problem was that he was absolutely caught up with the theory of evolution and absolutely denies God and so those are the kind of books he gave to us. He lived alone but he said, "You're never alone when you've got a book to read". Jen asked him if he has ever read the Bible, and old Brian said he's read the whole Book.... And it's nothing more than a fable! However, he was very knowledgeable on certain things from the Bible and showed great remembrance of Biblical facts and events. But can you see the problem? He missed it.

▶ David Attenborough also is a well-known celebrity who has been on TV for many years presenting documentaries on planet earth, nature, and the wonders of all living things on this planet. He has travelled the world extensively and has shown to the world in high-definition absolutely amazing wonders in creation. The man is now 97 years old and has seen things you and I will never see in this world. But you know what? Like my neighbour, he has missed it. He has witnessed the handiwork of God, but has completely missed the hand of God. In an interview with Andrew Denton, Sir David Attenborough basically states that there is no God because if there was an all-merciful God, then He wouldn't have created the little worm that lives in the eyeball of a little boy who sits on a river bank in West Africa that will turn him blind in a few years. Because of that argument Satan has planted in his mind, he has missed it all.

▶ Folks, don't be like that with God's Word. Plug your life into the one who has always been, is right now and will always be and into His eternal Word! Don't miss Him!

Next when we continue in this series, we will move from this greeting of John, and will take a close look at the true picture of Jesus, as He is today. If you want to know what Jesus looks like, then that is going to be the message for you!!